

bmj.com news roundup

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Care of England's older people still "unacceptably poor"

Despite attempts to improve health and other care services for older people in England in the past five years, progress has been inconsistent and patchy, a joint report from three inspection bodies has found.

The Audit Commission, the Healthcare Commission, and the Commission for Social Care Inspection looked at developments in services since the 10 year national service framework for older people was published in March 2001.

Their report highlights the lack of dignity and respect in the way older people are treated when they are in hospital. Standards of care are still "unacceptably poor." Examples include using wards and bays designated as single sex for both sexes and moving older people from ward to ward, sometimes in the middle of the night and not always for clinical reasons.

Older people with mental health problems were particularly vulnerable in hospital, said the report.

Lynn Eaton *London*

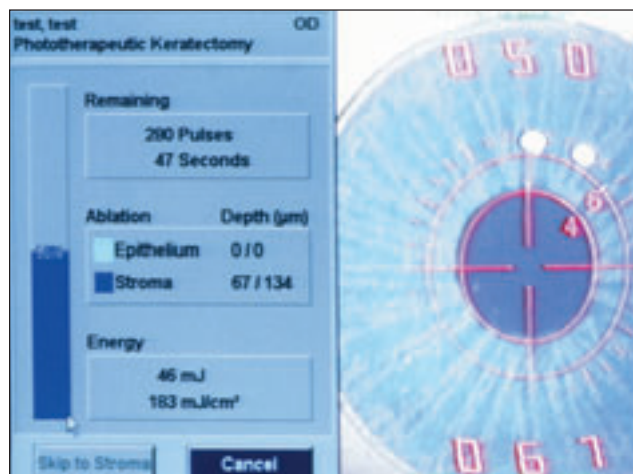
The report, *Living Well in Later Life*, is available at www.healthcarecommission.org.uk.

Critically ill men in drug trial continue to improve

One of the two men left critically ill by a phase I trial of a new monoclonal antibody almost two weeks ago is improving, says the latest statement released by the hospital caring for him.

The statement, from the critical care department at Northwick Park Hospital, London, said, "The two volunteers have each made improvements since last week."

"One is in a serious condition. The other is still critical but we are pleased with his progress since last week. However, we remain cautious as his condition is still complex." Staff said



People considering laser eye surgery should be warned of risks, says NICE

Laser surgery for short and long sightedness and astigmatism is generally safe and effective, but surgeons should make people aware of the potential risks, guidance published last week says.

The guidance, for the NHS in England, Wales, and Scotland, found that the three most common types of laser eye surgery—laser in situ keratomileusis (LASIK), photorefractive keratotomy (PRK), and laser epithelial keratomileusis (LASEK)—were similarly effective.

A systematic review of published evidence, commissioned by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), found that 91% of eyes treated for myopia or astigmatism with LASIK achieved within 1.0 dioptre of the intended correction at 3-12 months, compared with a median of 89% with PRK for myopia and 92% with LASEK for myopia and astigmatism.

However, surgery in a few patients led to deterioration in visual acuity, development of new visual disturbances, and corneal infection. A median of 0.5% (range 0-20.5%) of eyes treated with PRK, 0% (0-8.2%) of eyes treated with LASEK, and 0.6% (0-3%) of eyes treated with LASIK lost visual acuity. This was more likely to occur in people with severe shortsightedness.

Susan Mayor *London*

The guidance, *Photorefractive (Laser) Surgery for the Correction of Refractive Error*, is available at www.nice.org.uk.

they were unable to comment further without breaching patient confidentiality.

The hospital said that the four other men involved in the trial were continuing to make a good recovery. "They continue to receive specialist care and observation, but have been discharged from critical care," the statement said.

All six men were healthy volunteers who became seriously ill after being given the antibody TGN1412 in a phase I trial carried out at a privately run research unit on the hospital campus (*BMJ* 2006;332:683, 25 Mar).

Susan Mayor *London*

Germany may change drug testing rules after debacle in England

German experts are discussing stricter regulations for trials after the catastrophic events at Northwick Park Hospital, in London, last month, when six volunteers became severely ill in a phase I trial.

Originally, Parexel, the contract research organisation running the study, had planned to carry it out in Berlin but moved it to London because approval from the Medicines and Health-

care Products Regulatory Agency, the UK regulatory authority, came through earlier than approval from the Paul-Ehrlich-Institut, the German federal agency for the use of biological medical products.

Germany is involved, however, because the trial was commissioned by a German company, the small biotech firm TeGenero and the drug was manufactured by one of Germany's largest drug companies, Boehringer Ingelheim.

Johannes Löwer, head of the Paul-Ehrlich-Institut, said that like the UK Authority, his institute had not found any indications pointing to the risk of severe adverse effects.

The Institut is currently considering banning phase I trials of high risk monoclonal antibodies in three to six volunteers simultaneously.

Annette Tuffs *Heidelberg*

Dutch doctors campaign for smoking ban in hospitality industry

The Dutch Medical Association is backing a campaign to allow MPs a free vote on banning smoking in hotels, restaurants, and cafes. To date, Dutch MPs have been reluctant to support a ban, believing that Dutch society, with its smoking tradition, is opposed to such a move. The government, therefore, has opted to allow the hospitality industry to regulate itself, at least until 2008.

But from 1 May, citizens will have the right to initiate legislative proposals if they can muster 40 000 signatures. The anti-smoking lobby group Clean Air Netherlands has launched a campaign for a proposed ban and has managed to gather more than 12 000 signatures in the first weeks (www.cleanairnederland.nl).

The Dutch Medical Association has decided to support the campaign, arguing that the smoke-free zones and special ventilation systems proposed under self regulation offer "insufficient protection against the harmful effects of tobacco smoke."

Tony Sheldon *Utrecht*